



About the United Way of Central Iowa Out-of-School Time Initiative

Updated August 2014

Beginning in fourth grade, children are *reading to learn*, using their skills to read math and science, to solve problems, to acquire knowledge based on their interests, and to critically think about what they are learning (Leila Fiester et al 2010, p. 9). This, of course, is the desired state for all children. In reality, not all children read or perform at grade level. According to the Children's Reading Foundation, up to half of printed fourth grade school curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level. Researchers at John Hopkins University identified that not performing at grade level can build up the pressure on the child to the extent that they lose interest and motivation to stay in school, thus eventually dropping out. This is an unacceptable trajectory.

It is critical that communities, alongside schools, support our students' learning both in and out of the classroom.

United Way of Central Iowa recognizes that out-of-school time presents an opportunity to support a students' school day learning through hands-on, engaging programming and that participation in high quality OST can improve student behavior, proficiency, and interest. United Way of Central Iowa is investing in a special initiative of its Education Early and Middle Grade Success Strategies that seeks to build and sustain the organizational and staff capacity of programs to provide high quality learning activities before school, after school and over the summer through the one-on-one support of a literacy coach and information sharing through a network of OST providers. The OST Literacy Initiative strives to:

- ✓ Increase the frequency of high quality learning activities provided in OST;
- ✓ Improve the quality (appropriateness, quantity, and categorical diversity) of program resources available to support high quality learning activities;
- ✓ Improve staff capabilities (knowledge and confidence) to provide high quality learning activities;
- ✓ Improve collaboration among OST and stakeholders, including schools, parents, and the youth themselves;
- ✓ And improve the use of data in OST to individualize programming and evaluate impact.

Literacy coaching in OST looks similar to coaching in schools. However, the strategies recommended are not the same. While activities implemented as part of the OST Initiative align with the respective school district goals and curricula, the learning in OST is different from the school day. It is important to distinguish between the purpose of instruction and learning, and acknowledge the critical role of each in the success of our children and youth. OST is an opportunity to present concepts in new contexts, allow children and youth to explore their passions, and give them a chance to try new ideas in a safe and supportive environment.

Instruction and Learning

Learning occurs throughout the day and over our lifetimes. Schools provide instruction on critical concepts – from reading and writing to science and art – that build a foundation of knowledge. Critical thinking and problem solving apply knowledge within real world contexts to “make meaning” through learning. Without chances to develop both knowledge and meaning, our students will not be successful.

OST provides children and youth the opportunities they need to explore concepts within more contexts than are available in schools. Together, schools and OST can complement and reinforce one another for the ultimate success of our students well into their futures.

To this end, literacy coaches will use the following framework to build and sustain organizational and staff capacity to provide high quality learning opportunities in OST.

1. *The “Why”*: the identified need for the strategy and current research base
2. *The “How”*: demonstration of strategies and identification of resources needed for implementation
3. *The “Do”*: observation of staff implementing new strategies
4. *Reflection*: feedback and reflection regarding strategies, including how to ensure consistent implementation over time
5. *Collaboration*: sharing out strategies that work and evidence of their impact

Programs participating in the OST Initiative will benefit from the knowledge and expertise of a literacy coach, be provided supplemental funds to purchase materials needed to implement activities with the literacy coach, and learn from their peers through best practice and resource sharing. UWCI has committed to investing in this Initiative for the next year based on the results of the pilot year 2013-2014.

<https://ostinitiative.wikispaces.com>

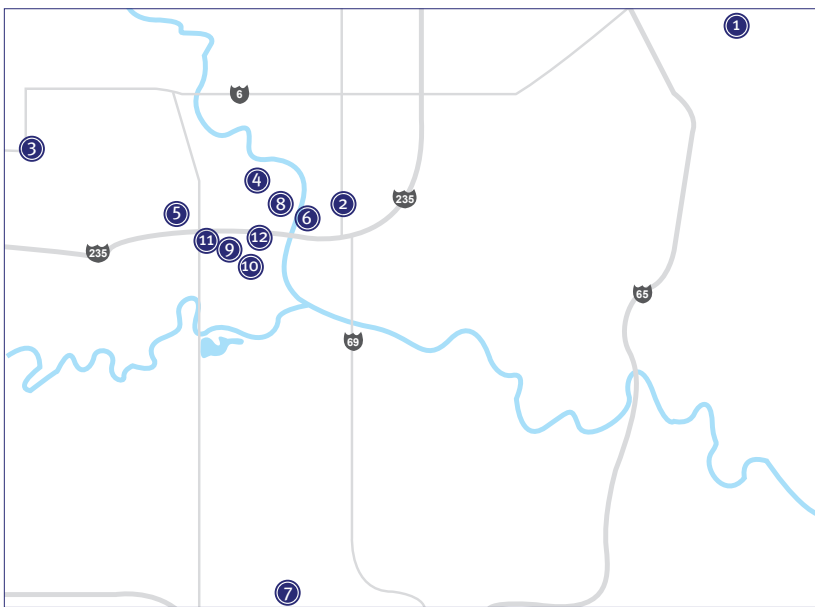
What are the characteristics of high quality learning opportunities in OST?

To be most effective at improving outcomes for children and youth, OST programs must provide learning opportunities that:

- ✓ Are planned;
- ✓ Include literacy components;
- ✓ Are engaging;
- ✓ And are scheduled.

Notice that to be impactful, the activity does not have to focus on literacy, but rather incorporate reading and/or writing to give students exposure to text in various contexts.

OST Initiative Partners – 2014/2015



- 1 Altoona Kids Klub
- 2 Baker Boys and Girls Club (Hiatt Middle School)
- 3 Camp Fire
- 4 CFUM
- 5 First Christian Boys and Girls Club
- 6 Levitt Boys and Girls Club (Carver Elementary)
- 7 McCombs Middle School Boys and Girls Club
- 8 Metro Kids
- 9 Oakridge Neighborhood Services
- 10 Pace Juvenile Center
- 11 Willkie House Inc
- 12 Young Women's Resource Center

Contact:

State Public Policy Group (SPPG) provides day-to-day support to the OST Initiative under contract with United Way of Central Iowa. SPPG also provides staff support to *Iowa Afterschool Alliance*, a critical resource to this project and others statewide that seek to expand access to high quality afterschool programming.

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